

Final Reports: Personal Reflections on Politics and History in Our Time

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Book Reviews

dialogue is in the spirit of what we know of the Olives and their associates. With many illustrations, explanatory notes, an appendix of cattle brands, and a brilliantly colored scene of Print and Jim among the longhorns, painted by George Phippen, *Ladder of Rivers* offers a good read for those who want to relive the drama of the old-time cattle range.

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

DAVID REMLEY

Final Reports: Personal Reflections on Politics and History in Our Time, by Richard Rovere. Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1984. xvi, 230 pp. Index. \$16.95 cloth.

Final Reports is the informative memoirs of political analyst and commentator Richard Rovere (1915-1979). It presents Rovere's opinions, impressions, and memories of forty turbulent years of world history. It contains reminiscences of childhood in the 1920s in Brooklyn and Queens, New York, and meanderings through various political ideologies during the Depression years. Rovere flirted with communism for a time, working as an assistant editor at *New Masses* magazine from 1938 to 1939. He personally inspected Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs in action. He knew the inside of congressional scandals. He walked through crowds of demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. His acquaintances included many presidents and other powerful figures, among them Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom he thought "a symbol of unity" (151), and John F. Kennedy, whom he believed "not deeply committed" (175). He also explores such personalities as Senate Majority Leader Robert A. Taft, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Rovere measured the impact of antipoverty projects in both America and Africa. He was a respected thinker, and his reports on those trips exposed both the successes and foibles of the Kennedy generation's attempts to solve people's problems through government programs.

Rovere's reminiscences serve a twofold purpose for the historian. First, the book is part of the times that spawned it. It represents the particular opinion of an influential personality of those years. Second, *Final Reports* also brings historical names, dates, and facts to life through its author's candid descriptions and remarks on people, places, and events. Rovere viewed life from a very humane perspective and his accounts of the McCarthy Era, the Korean War, and Vietnam are colored by the characters of the participants and

Rovere's own reactions to them. The book is thus a primary source for the historian.

Richard Rovere wrote for the *New Yorker* for most of his career. His column, "Letter from Washington," reported his views on the events of the day, and he authored a number of books. His indictment of the Johnson administration and the Vietnam War, *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy*, is probably his best known book. *Final Reports* is the second of two volumes of Rovere's memoirs; the first, *Arrivals and Departures*, appeared in 1976. Unfinished at Rovere's death in 1979, *Final Reports* is complete and unified throughout the first two-thirds of its length. The last third trails off, leaving the reader with a number of unfinished questions. However, Jeannette Hopkins, assisted by Rovere's family and friends, has done a good job of editing and arranging Rovere's text and entries from his journal. The combination of the two creates a coherent and informative narrative which nicely fills the gaps left by the author.

Richard Rovere was a skilled practitioner of the English language. Indeed, his friend Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote the forward for this book, stated that "his prose has a grace, fastidiousness, and lucidity matched during this century in the American trade only by Walter Lippmann" (vi). Rovere's style is at turns informative, entertaining, and emotive. He relates to readers on a personal level, bringing us into a poor mountain community in New Mexico, to Europe with John F. Kennedy, or into the anguish of awaiting the return of a son from Vietnam. The book reads like a conversation with the author or a personal letter from him. For instance, he remarked after a tour of Kenya for the Peace Corps that was more thorough than he had expected: "I can assert that former Ambassador William Atwood didn't know what he was talking about when he told me I would never be more than fifty miles from a golf course" (180).

Rovere's style also has its limits, however. Neither his humane perspective nor his liberally oriented politics favors an impartiality. His tendency to comment on facts rather than to report them leaves the historian with few footnotes to verify sources. Yet Rovere's last work is an intellectual and emotional journey. Just as Ronald Steel peels away the layers of learning, experience, and personal emotion and reflection that went into Walter Lippmann's writing, so does Rovere reveal the experience and thought that went into his own work. The break in his intellectual life caused by the signing of the Soviet-Nazi antiaggression pact is one example. Rovere was a member of the American Communist party and a writer for *New Masses*

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when the pact was signed on August 24, 1939. He disapproved of Stalin's brutal policies but believed the American Communist party need not endorse them to be an effective agent of change in the United States. Rovere resigned from both the party and the magazine when the party ordered him to endorse the treaty in an article for *New Masses*. He felt as though an army led by "mad generals" had fooled him and he vowed never again to surrender his intellectual independence to anyone (59-62). Richard Rovere contributed conspicuously to the conscience of the country during his life. His memoirs should help make that conscience an enduring legacy for a tumultuous era.

CARNEGIE-MELLON UNIVERSITY

STEVEN AGORATUS

Book Notices

Iowa Place Names of Indian Origin, by Virgil J. Vogel. (Iowa City: The University of Iowa Press, 1983. 150 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, \$19.95 cloth, \$12.50 paper.)

This is the first book to deal exclusively with the aboriginal impact on the map of Iowa. The author, a noted scholar in Native American history, lists all Iowa place names, political or topographical, in the Indian languages, those translated from Indian language names, and those related to some aspect of Indian history. A brief historical background is given for each name as well as an interpretation of its meaning and an explanation of its cultural context. The reader will find some myths rejected in this book, but much more important is the bringing together of all of the Indian names which we see on maps, road signs, park monuments, billboards, and bank buildings into one place where they are given some explanation. This is a very worthwhile project and the University of Iowa Press should be proud of producing such a work.

The Image of War, 1861-1865. Vol. VI, The End of an Era, edited by William C. Davis. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. for the National Historical Society, 1984. 496 pp., illustrations, index, \$39.95 cloth.)

This is the final volume in the superb "Image of War" series which began in 1981. The last volume lives up to its reputation and the entire series meets its promise to be the most complete pictorial history of the Civil War. This last volume contains a comprehensive

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